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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SANAA 002151

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/ARP AMACDONALD AND INR JYAPHE

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TAGS: PGOV PNAT PTER PINR YM

SUBJECT: ROYG PREEMPTS SOUTHERN PROTESTS, ATTEMPTS TO STIFLE UNREST

REF: SANAA 02128

Classified By: CDA Angie Bryan for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. While widespread violence did not erupt during Southern Mobility Movement (SMM) demonstrations on November 30 in Aden (reftel), tens of thousands of protestors flooded the streets despite government warnings not to assemble days before and a preemptive scale-up in ROYG security presence. Several thousand protestors were detained and four bystanders were killed in a series of carjackings and clashes with SMM activists and security personnel. In response to the disruption of the SMM's planned Southern Independence Day demonstrations on November 30, the SMM held more protests in Dali' on December 1 in which no one was killed due to a lack of ROYG presence in that region. This does not exclude the possibility of further demonstrations by the SMM, particularly in governorates where the central government is weaker, and counteractions by the ROYG and northern tribesmen angered by the targeting of northerners.
END SUMMARY.

WHO WANTS TO COME OUT TO PLAY?

¶2. (C) ROYG forces lined the streets of Aden early on the morning of November 30, the day marking southern Yemen's 42nd anniversary of independence from the British, in the hopes of pre-empting the Southern Mobility Movement (SMM) protests which many observers had expected to result in violence (reftel). On November 28 the ROYG issued a number of warnings in Aden that any unlicensed protests would not be allowed. Basha Bashraheel, head of the independent, Aden-based Al-Ayyam newspaper, believes these decrees were a ploy to discredit the SMM, since there is no established process to apply for such a permit. Despite the ROYG's show of force, protestors turned out in droves for demonstrations, resulting in thousands of arrests and the death of one security official and three civilian bystanders in clashes between the ROYG and armed SMM activists. Opposition and independent media sources reported that thousands of protestors participated in demonstrations in Abyan, Lahj, and Dali'. Basha Bashraheel told PolOff there were "tens of thousands of protestors in Aden alone, but it seemed like there were equal numbers, if not more, of soldiers in the streets." Ahmed al-Khamri, an Adeni local, told PolOff that "there were so many soldiers and protestors in the streets I was scared to go out of my house and will have to wait at least a few days before I can safely return to Sana'a." Local press reports indicate that anywhere from 500 to 2,600 protestors were jailed on November 30, but Bashraheel believes they will be held only temporarily. Khamri predicted that rumors of future retaliatory protests to be held in areas outside Aden the week of December 5 may prompt the security forces to hold the November 30 protestors indefinitely until the ROYG feels

secure that they would not partake in any future protests.

THE WRONG PLACE AT THE WRONG TIME

¶3. (C) A ROYG corporal, Fawaz Abdullah Ali Khaled al-Kamali, was killed in Shabwah on November 30 by gunmen on the road to Aden. According to press reports, Kamali was driving to Ta'iz to spend Eid with his family when he was carjacked and killed by activists once they discovered his military ID. Bashraheel opined the gunmen were avenging the November 25 deaths of southern protestors and killed Kamali "simply because he was a northern soldier." Two other carjackings resulted in the death of three northerners, all supposedly Eid travelers visiting family in southern Yemen who did not have an active role in either suppressing or participating in the protests. In retaliation for the carjackings of northerners, the Radama tribe in Ibb, the Mourees tribe in Qataba, and the Anss tribe in Dhamar have reportedly set up checkpoints along major roads searching for southerners from al-Habilayn and Yafi who might have killed their tribesmen. The Ministry of Defense-owned weekly September 26 reported that SMM activists were responsible for the carjackings, but Nasir al-Khabji, an SMM leader, issued statements denying his group was responsible. Khabji was quoted in Aden Press, a pro-secessionist Arabic language daily, claiming that either individuals acting independently killed the bystanders or that pro-ROYG "militias are behind these events in a desperate attempt to characterize the SMM as a criminal organization that kills based on identification cards." Bashraheel believes one of the carjackings to be the work of the Committee to Protect Unity, a pro-government vigilante

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group, in an attempt to frame the SMM for anti-northern violence.

COMMENT

¶4. (C) While widespread violence did not materialize on November 30 due to a ramped-up military presence in Aden, recent restrictions along the roads, and pre-emptive warnings not to assemble, tensions are still running high in southern Yemen, particularly in governorates with limited ROYG control. With much of the military engaged in Sa'ada, President Saleh has limited military and security assets to deploy to southern Yemen if the situation worsens. The emergence of random carjackings and killing of bystanders based on southern-northern animosity is disturbing, particularly if revenge killings and tribal rivalries become inflamed by SMM protests and ROYG retaliatory crackdowns in their struggle for predominance in southern Yemen. END

COMMENT.

BRYAN